SPAWN
THE DARK AGES
SPAWN.COM
12
DIGITAL
EDITION

Todd McFarlane & Image Comics Present

A Child's Crusade Part II
The Faithful

Dedicated to Steve Firchow

STORY
Brian Holguin

PENCILS
Angel Medina

INKS
Jonathan Glapion

COVER
Liam McCormack-Sharp

LETTERING
Richard Starkings
and Comicraft's
Oscar Gongora

COLOR
Mark Nicholas

SPAWN created by Todd McFarlane

SPAWN DARK AGES II SUMMARY:

Covenant worries that the children will not be able to hold-up in the heat of battle, but Maeve has confidence in her warriors. The army encounters a group of knights who block their passage. Although the children's army suffers some loss, they are victorious in their first skirmish. The next day, Maeve awakens to find that a hundred new children have come to join the crusade. Covenant is surprised by the volunteers, but is unable to shake the feeling that the group is being watched. Cogliostro has been shadowing the army since the beginning.

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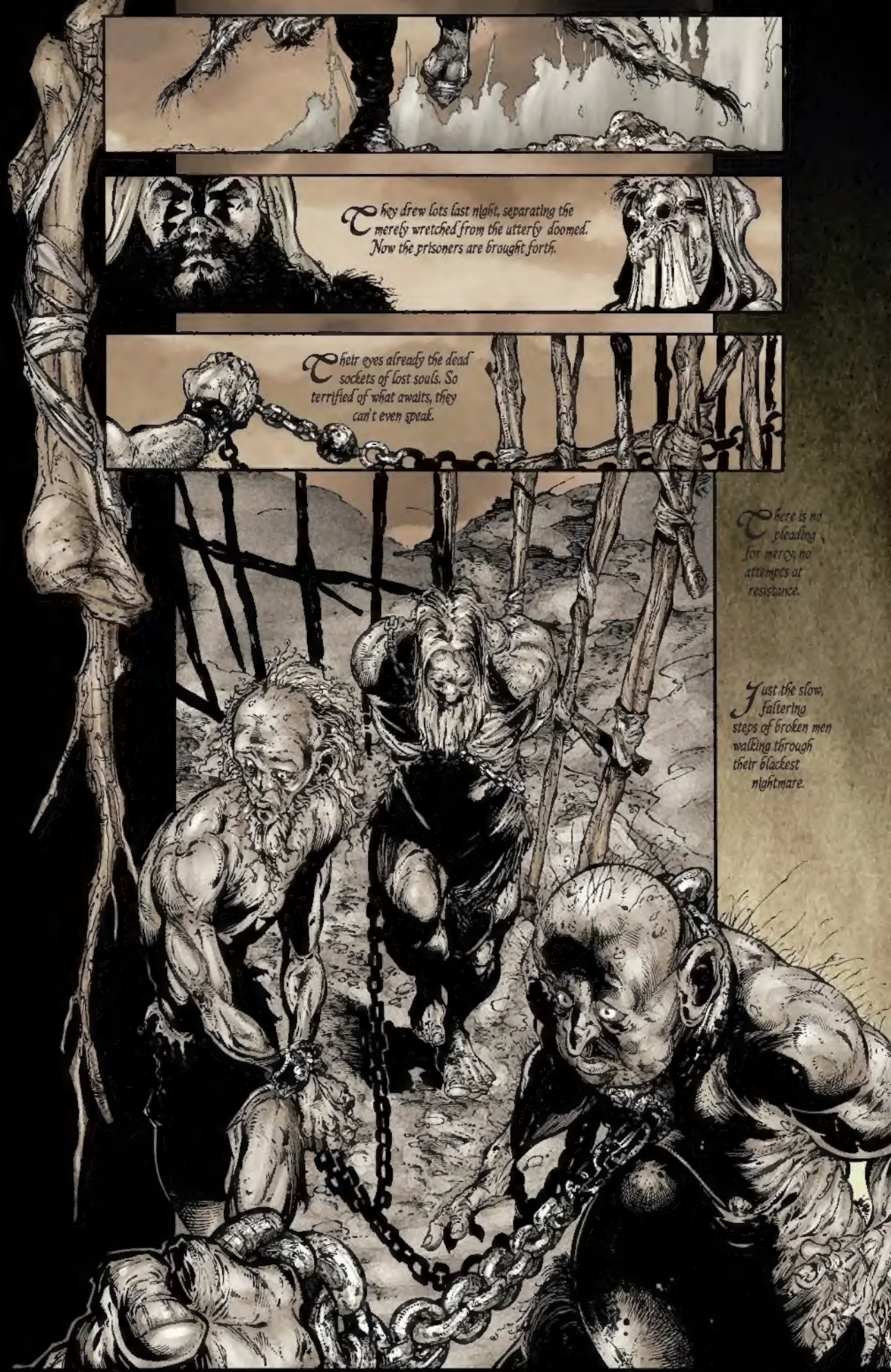
London. The court of King John.
With the death of his brother, the Lionheart, King John has inherited a kingdom in turmoil.
Urged by a domineering mother, John has been forced to raise tax levies and increase the conscription of troops in an attempt to regain lands recently lost to the French crown.
These measures have led to stirrings of rebellion from among his barons, and the looming possibility of civil war.
The king is about to have a new matter added to his concerns.
Heavy, it has been said, is the head that wears the crown. Heavier still is the heart of he who must deliver to the crown bad news.

My liege...
Yes, yes. That's enough of bowing and scraping, Anders. Now tell me what's so bloody important.
An army. Of sorts, anyway. From distant Cornwall.
An army against the crown?
We don't know, my liege. A group of runaways, led by a strange girl. They call her Maeve the Magnificent. She says she fights for God...
Yes, I've heard of her. She doesn't concern me.
I don't think she poses a direct threat, at least not yet, but I don't think you can afford to look--
What? Unsympathetic? I am so weak that a coarse word from a rustic strumpet could bring me down? I think not. But still, your point is taken...

Elsewhere, in a hidden camp in the western wilds of England...
Events unfold, following a darker design.


They drew lots last night, separating the merely wretched from the utterly doomed. Now the prisoners are brought forth.
Their eyes already the dead sockets of lost souls. So terrified of what awaits, they can't even speak.
There is no pleading for mercy, no attempts at resistance.
Just the slow, faltering steps of broken men walking through their blackest nightmare.

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They are herded into the great wicker cage, stuffed tight against its massive ribs.
Inside, there is quiet, desperate murmuring and shaking with fear.
And then fire comes.
Followed by the screaming.

Inhuman screaming and wailing as the fire consumes the great sacrifice and those inside.
Screams which, it is hoped, will span across the worlds and reach the ears of the sleeping gods.
This is just the beginning...

Look at them...
A band of mere babes, barely out of their swaddling. This is a fool's errand if ever I saw one... I will not lead children off to their doom, especially in the name of God.
I know all too well the folly of putting your faith in Heaven's kindnesses.
If this madness is God's will, then God is a bigger bastard than even I believed.

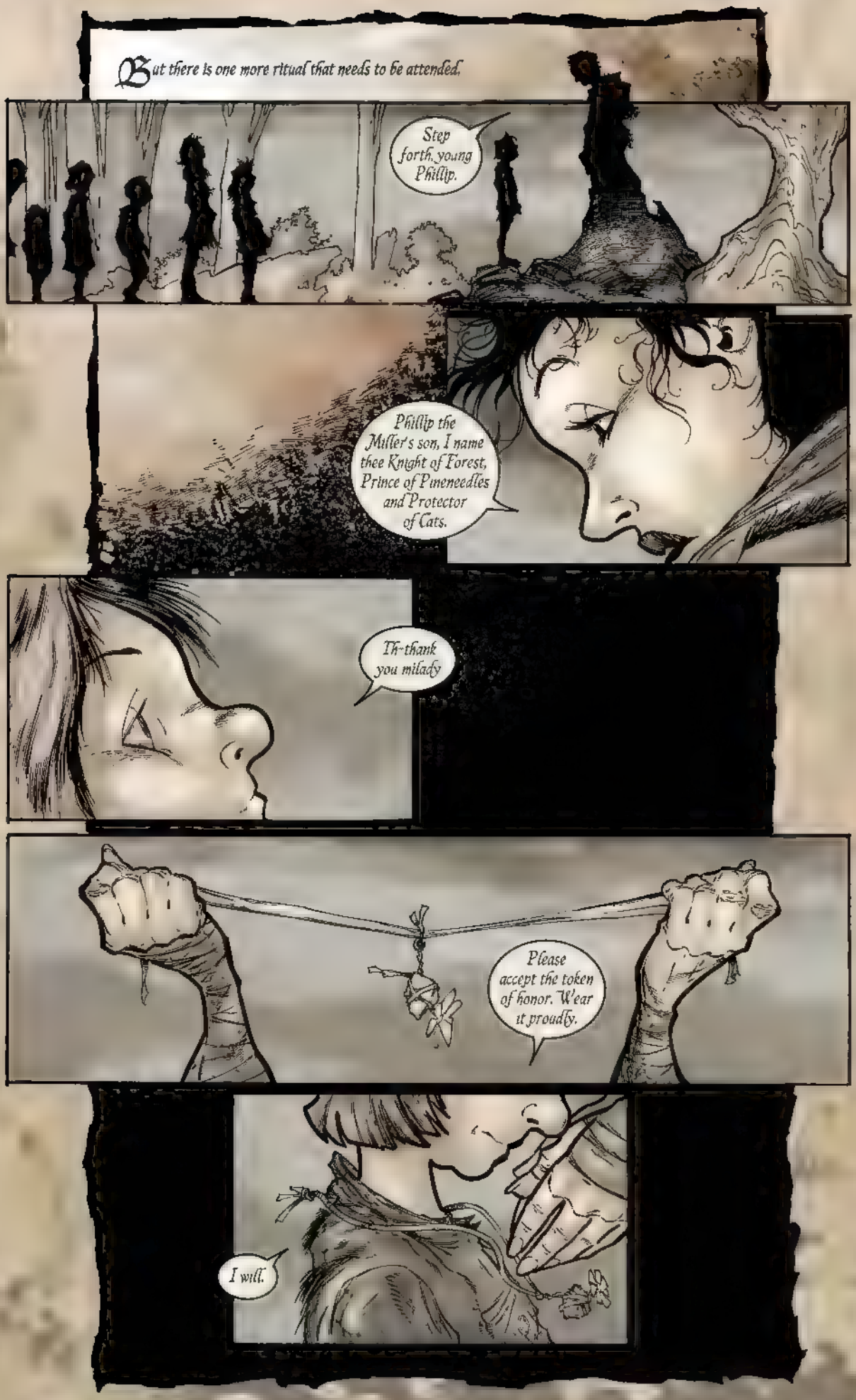
Maeve!
Maeve!
Lord Covenant, please be kind enough not to interrupt my morning prayers.
I will have words with you.
Of course you will. You always do.

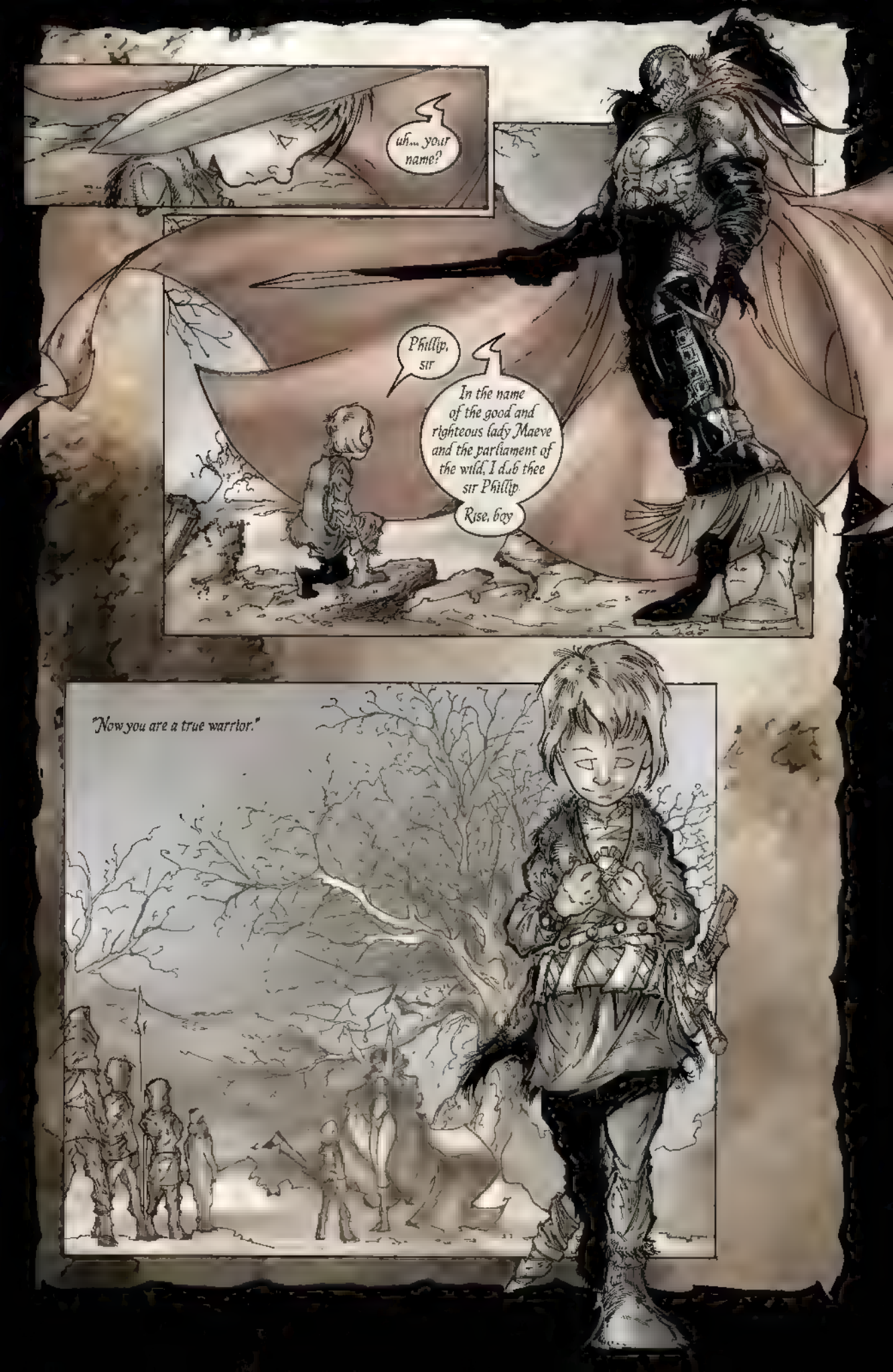
Let me guess. You are in grave doubts about our task.
Come quick! The lady approaches.
They are babes in woods, no proper army Ill-prepared for a game of soldiers, let alone the task we have ahead
That is what you see, isn't it, Lord Covenant?
But I see Soldiers of God. Warriors whose souls are untainted, whose hearts are pure. Look at the faith and wonder in their eyes.
But as for myself, I must
This is a miracle. I know you don't believe in miracles, and that, sadly, is your right.
Have faith in my faith, Covenant, if not your own.

No!
Uff!
Look at me! This is the face of war! I am the specter of death that haunts every shadow!
Run! Run home, you flee-bitten mites!
A pure heart bleeds just the same as a blackened one. Perhaps easier
Go! All of you!
Return to your mothers or face my wrath!

Go.
Lord Covenant is trying to frighten us. And well he should. We must have no illusions about what lies ahead.
Yet I think it is better to die fighting for God's will, than to live hiding from it.
Still, anyone who wishes to leave is free to do so. There is no shame. Who wishes to turn back?
No one?
And what about you, Lord Covenant.

Shamed by Maeve's unwavering courage, Covenant rejoins the ragged band. Despite his misgivings he cannot let them walk into battle alone.
And they travel on, through sun and rain, spirits high and hearts filled with pride.
How like a candle in the darkness Maeve is, the Hellspawn thinks to himself.
And perhaps, in time, a little of her endless, incandescent hope has begun to rub off on him.


But there is one more ritual that needs to be attended.
Step forth, young Phillip.
Phillip the Miller's son, I name thee Knight of Forest, Prince of Pineneedles and Protector of Cats.
Th-thank you milady
Please accept the token of honor. Wear it proudly.
I will.


uh... your name?
Phillip, sir
In the name of the good and righteous lady Maeve and the parliament of the wild, I dub thee sir Phillip.
Rise, boy
"Now you are a true warrior."

Two days later.
What is it?
The bones of an ogre?
A dragon?
It's just some old branches.
This is the devil's work.

What is this? I don't understand
Something smells awful...
These things... these lumps... I think they used to be people
This place... it's something wicked.
Covenant! Are you all right?

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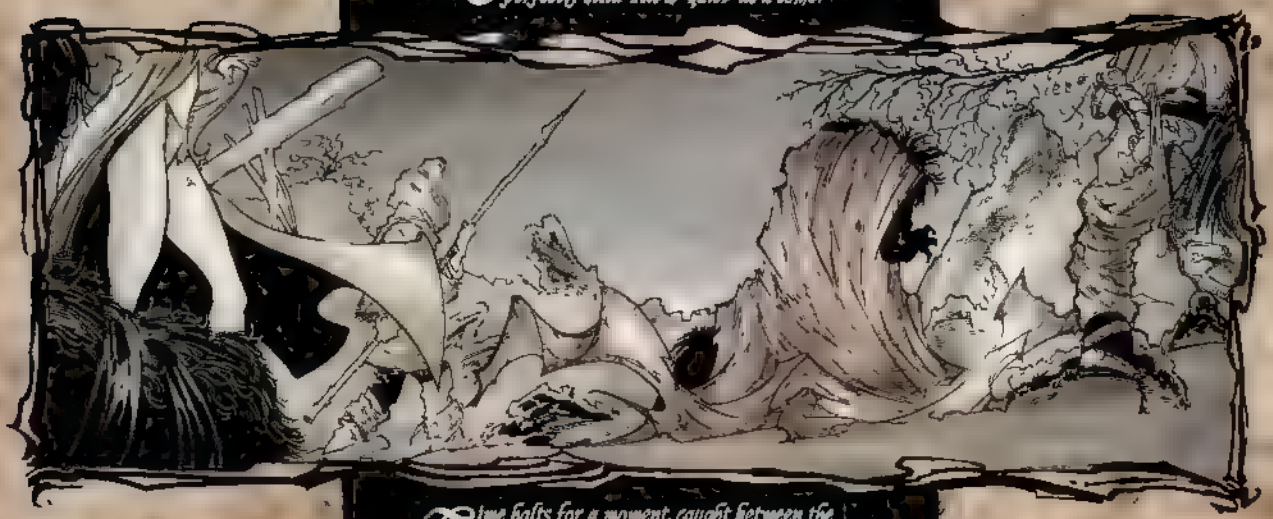
No!
The Hellspawn's right arm quakes, twisting and spasming as if possessed of a mind all its own.
It reaches for his sword, battling against its master's will
Some surge from the Hellborne powers that still flow through his veins must be causing this strange palsy.
Some necroplasmic reaction that knows its host is in danger
But the Hellspawn has forsworn those powers. He will not let them overtake him.
Something is wrong. Maeve, look to the children!

The seizure subsides and the air stands perfectly still. All is quiet as a tomb.



Time halts for a moment, caught between the span of panicked heartbeats.

All around, the children scan the horizon.

Something is coming.

HAAAAAH!

If the children are frightened, they don't have time to realize it.
The battle is joined, quickly and decisively.
With each arrow flown, each blow delivered, their confidence rises. These are not monsters, not demons from some dark pit that face them.
But merely men, dressed in animal skin and face paint. They are mortal and they can die.

The tide turns quickly, and the strange faced marauders are soon routed.
HUZZAH HUZZAH YEEAH!
In the elation of a battle won they give chase to their retreating opponents.
Wait!
But when they reach the top of the rise, cheers of joy turn to stunned gasps.
And light hearts swiftly turn to lead.
By the saints!

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